



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
730 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington, MA 02476
Phone: 781-316-3000

webmaster@town.arlington.ma.us

Budget Minutes 08/26/2009

Budget Subcommittee of the Arlington School Committee

Minutes for Meeting of August 26, 2009, 5:00 p.m., School Committee Room

APPROVED September 16, 2009

Attendees

Committee Members Joseph A. Curro, Jr., Chair
 Ronald Spangler
 Cindy Starks

Administration Interim Superintendent Kathleen Bodie

Others Richard Fanning, Finance Committee
 Vicki Ford
 Juli Brazile

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:07 p.m.

Public Participation

The chair invited public participation. No members of the public wished to share any matters of concern during this portion of the meeting.

Review of Minutes

On a motion of Dr. Spangler, seconded by Mr. Curro, the minutes were adopted by a vote of 2-0-1, Ms. Starks abstaining.

Per request of Ms. Ford, the Chair agreed to administratively reflect with a note in the final minutes the actual date that the subsequent budget subcommittee meeting took place.

Review of Updated FY 2010 Budget Document

Dr. Bodie distributed a breakdown showing a decline of Arlington Public Schools Title Grants in the amount of \$134,107 from 2008-2009 to 2009-2010.

The interim Superintendent also provided copies of a consolidated budget document, reflecting all votes taken by the School Committee. Dr. Spangler explained that he was interested in using this to perform spreadsheet analysis of cost drivers.

Dr. Bodie offered to provide an electronic copy, but she warned that there might be the possibility of another minor

revision. Dr. Spangler asked what might precipitate such a revision, to which the interim Superintendent replied that there were small adjustments that might be needed to respond to developments during the summer.

Mr. Curro asked if copies of the consolidated budget document could be placed in all committee members' packets, and Dr. Bodie responded that she intended to do so.

Discussion of Fiscal Year 2011 Budget

Administrative Team Budget Development

Dr. Bodie reviewed an FY11 budget development analysis outline major considerations around District revenues and expenses. She explained that she had started speaking with the administrative team about options, and that initial estimates were for the need to cut or raise \$2 million or more.

Dr. Bodie explained that current budget assumptions around the special education circuit breaker assumed a 47.5% rate of reimbursement after the District's required contribution, but she warned that this rate could go down.

The interim Superintendent stated that baseline budgeting assumptions are for a 4% rate of growth in the school budget and the same level of ARRA funding as in FY 2010. She stated that she had received help in developing assumptions from Assistant Town Manager Nancy Galkowski, and she was concerned that there may be a need to "budget down."

Dr. Bodie said that the District has taken a big hit on Title I funds, exclusive of ARRA (from which we receive no Title I funding).

The interim Superintendent reported that this year approximately 10 – or slightly fewer – students will be coming back to the District, largely because of the new programs that will be housed at the Stratton Elementary School.

She said that we could have more F-1 students, but that it would take some work to absorb so many more students.

On the issue of salaries, Dr. Bodie stated that the cost of column moves appears to be steady, but that it would not be sustainable or fair to maintain no salary increase for FY 2011. She also called out enrollment growth as a question mark, stating that it could remain steady.

In the expense area, Dr. Bodie called out the impact of various categories. In one of her notes, she references savings to be realized from automatically placing computers in "sleep mode," which Dr. Spangler pointed out would have to exceed the \$25,000 already budgeted in the current fiscal year.

Dr. Bodie noted other potentially problematic costs, such as the potential need to replace a network hub at Stratton for a projected cost of \$25,000. Mr. Fanning asked if this would fall under the capital budget, and Dr. Bodie noted that options are being looked at.

On the issue of special education, Dr. Bodie projected that if we were able to bring another 15 students back into the District, we could save around \$600,000. Dr. Spangler questioned the year-on-year increases, pointing out that if we were able to keep everything to 4% increases, we just might have a sustainable school system.

Regarding transportation, Dr. Bodie discussed the fact that the District is renting two vehicles this year and sitting on old equipment. She said that we had asked for one bus in the capital plan, which didn't come through.

Dr. Bodie spoke of potential savings by joining the GIC, saying that the Schools share of any savings could be on the order of 55% -- even though the School Department accounts for 2/3 of Town employees. Dr. Spangler said that he had been hearing proposals to split savings three ways between Town and School budgets and employee increases.

On athletics, Dr. Bodie noted that we recently joined the Middlesex League and that the application was predicated in part on providing freshman, junior varsity, and varsity opportunities for certain sports.

In discussing the last resort option of allowing class sizes to creep up further and the role of teacher assistants, Dr. Bodie noted that Arlington has fewer TAs than a lot of schools around us. She also pointed out that class size increases affect inequities between schools. Nevertheless, she strongly advised waiting to take on redistricting until after the Thompson project is completed.

Mr. Curro asked if there had been consideration of buffer zones, and Dr. Spangler concurred that we should look at this. In response to a question from Ms. Brazile, Dr. Bodie explained that buffer zones are flexible district lines that can be utilized to address imbalances on an as-needed basis while keeping neighborhoods together.

Dr. Spangler asked about the theme of "9 schools, one district." Dr. Bodie answered that there is total commitment on that theme, and that there have to be common expectations around curriculum and timetables.

Dr. Spangler warned of the need to be careful about conflating redistricting with budget decisions if redistricting doesn't help to close the gap. He said that we needed to agree within the subcommittee on a way to define the deficit: for example, take what we have now, inflate it 5-7%, take revenue into account, and make sure we speak in those terms.

Dr. Bodie expressed support for the simplicity of the presentation format used for the current year's budget. Dr. Spangler stressed the need to demonstrate what the expected budget gap is. Dr. Bodie suggested starting the process of assembling this format.

During the ensuing discussion, it was suggested that structural changes implemented over the past four years – along with their estimated savings – be laid out to demonstrate the measures that the School Department has taken to cope with fiscal pressures. Dr. Spangler suggested that this would serve as an illustration of "past gains, past pains."

Ms. Starks underscored the need to start talking about how we might close the expected gap, and she suggested that we look to discuss this at the second full School Committee meeting in September.

Dr. Spangler left the meeting at 6:19 p.m.

Ms. Brazile observed that further class size sacrifices looked like where things were going to end up. She wondered if any out-of-the-box ideas were being considered.

Dr. Bodie asked if Ms. Brazile was referring to out-of-the-box ideas about how to teach in a different way. She said that one of the out-of-the-box ideas that had been discussed was the "pairing" of elementary schools with an associated grade reconfiguration. One problem with any such approach is that we are so close to a Thompson feasibility study with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. Dr. Bodie said that one of the only areas where restructuring might yield gains in the short term might be the implementation of block scheduling at the high school.

Ms. Starks said that we need to compare our administrative capacity with other districts, making it clear that there is a need for sufficient administrative support.

Draft Budget Timeline

Mr. Curro distributed a draft budget timeline, which elicited extensive discussion and many proposed changes. He noted all the suggestions and committed to returning to the next subcommittee meeting with a freshly revised draft.

The most immediate tasks around which there appeared to be consensus were the definition of the working deficit at the next Budget Subcommittee meeting and a brief overview of the FY 2011 budget – along with a timeline and retrospective of reductions to date – to be held at the second School Committee meeting in September.

Next Meeting

The date and time of the next subcommittee meeting were discussed, and Mr. Curro committed to checking with Dr. Spangler regarding September 10, 14, or 16. (*NOTE: The meeting was ultimately scheduled for September 16, 2009 at 5:00 p.m.*)

Adjournment

On motion of Ms. Starks, seconded by Mr. Curro, the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m. by unanimous vote.